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REVIEWS.

JOHN ARNOTT MACCULLOCH, *Celtic Mythology* (The Mythology of All Races, Volume III). Boston, Marshall Jones Company, 1918.

"AND by day they walk along the fields crying and wailing . . . imitating the crying of infants."

I had been asked to review the volume on "Celtic Mythology" in the "Mythology of All Races" series, and I opened the imposing octavo volume by chance at p. 253 to find the passage quoted above. "At last," I exclaimed in delight, "we are to have a book which makes a comparative study of the supernatural figures of Brythonic and Gaelic story! Here is the *buguel noz* of which M. Le Braz gives such interesting examples in 'La Légende de la Mort,' and of which such a tantalizing single instance has been collected in Ireland.¹ And here," as I turned back a few pages, "is a reference to that curious idea of cows giving blood instead of milk,—a notion which seemed grotesque and inexplicable when I found it in Manus O'Donnell's 'Life of Columcille.'² With a compendium of this sort available, no one will be tempted again to suggest that Fiona Macleod got his 'Washer of the Ford' in Spain;³ and we sha'n't have to ask for a book on Chrestien de Troyes⁴ or William Wallace in order to get *résumés* of Celtic stories."

But alas! when my eye wandered to the running title on the left side of the page, I found it was Slavic mythology I was reading. The "Mythology of All Races" includes two mythologies per volume, and I had opened the book a few pages beyond the portion devoted to Celtic. Not to be thwarted in my curiosity regarding the *buguel noz* and the "Washer of the Ford," I turned to look up these figures in the index, but only to discover that there is no index. In the last pages of the book one finds a bibliography headed "Welsh Texts," standing shoulder to shoulder with a bibliography headed "Slavic Abbreviations." The index, one learns, is to follow Volume XII.

There was nothing for it but to read the book from the beginning. The table of contents was not reassuring: "The Strife of the Gods, Tuatha de Danaan, The Division of the Sid, Mythic Powers of the Gods, Gods Helping Mortals, Divine Enmity and Punishment, The Loves of the Gods, The Divine Land, Mythical Animals and Other Beings, Myths of Origins, Paganism and Christianity." It was clear that the author had interpreted mythology in its narrowest sense, as an account of the fables about the gods, setting aside the interpretation which recognizes the close association of these fables of the great gods with a whole hierarchy of lesser spirits and associated

¹ *Revue Celtique*, 32 : 53-58.

² Ed. A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle. Illinois University Press, 1918, p. 301.

³ Compare *Modern Language Notes*, 33 (1918) : 352-356.

⁴ Iwain, by A. C. L. Brown (*Harvard Studies and Notes*, 1903), and *Mythical Bards and the Life of William Wallace*, by W. H. Schofield (*Harvard University Press*, 1920), contain many *résumés* of Old Irish tales, with bibliographical references.

ceremonies and taboos.¹ It was only too probable, moreover, that the divisions "Cuchulainn and his Circle," "Fionn and the Feinn," and "Arthur," would do nothing more than duplicate the *résumés* already accessible; and that the chapter on "Myths of the British Celts" would be the same old puzzling *Mabinogion* served cold.

It was my fears rather than my hopes of the book that were justified. It is perhaps not to be expected, in the present state of our knowledge of the Celtic past, that a book on Celtic mythology could be anything but fragmentary and superficial. Before so general a work can possibly be of much value, hundreds more of Celtic manuscripts must be edited, and the hundreds already edited must be analyzed minutely and given their correct interpretation and historical background. But the author could have done better than to present us with such an uncritical jumble as he gives. Statements from a Roman onlooker two thousand years ago and from a Roman Catholic peasant of yesterday are offered without the necessary reservations, as if they were of the same value as the *Leabhar na huidhri*. Material from Brittany, Cornwall, and Man is conspicuous by its absence. The author lists works on these subjects in his bibliography, but he gives no evidence of having read them. No effort is made to collect illustrations of the same mythological idea appearing in different branches of the Celts, and to bring them together under a rubric intelligible to a student of comparative mythology. Nor is there any systematic attempt to interpret Celtic mythology in relation to mythology in general, to discriminate between what is characteristic in it and what is common to all the twenty mythologies which form the series. The method and treatment, as well as the definition, of Celtic mythology, are hatched from the old classical egg. The first chapter is an enumeration of the Greek and Latin writers who mention Celtic gods and equate them with classical ones. As an approach to the understanding of Celtic ideas, this method is hardly more satisfactory than an attempt to understand geological formations in the light of the first chapters of Genesis.

The discussion of Christianity and Paganism is especially thin. It is unreasonable to expect that the author should himself have gone through any great number of hagiographical texts for mythological material; but he should at least have taken cognizance of the valuable compendium on this subject published by Plummer in the introduction to his "*Vitæ Sanctorum Hiberniæ*."

A glance at the bibliography suggests an explanation of some of the defects which we have signalized. The titles are to a large extent not texts, but discussions, sometimes of works only indirectly connected with Celtic mythology, such as French Arthurian romances. Some of them are popularizations; for example, Lady Gregory's "Gods and Fighting Men." Although periodicals such as the "*Revue Celtique*" are listed in the abbreviations and cited frequently in the notes, the author has used only to a slight extent the great number of texts bearing on his subject which they contain. "Eriu"

¹ The treatment of Slavic Mythology, by Jan Máchal, in the same volume, shows clearly the intention of the author to view the subject in its relation to culture and as a part of primitive religion.

the important "Journal of the School of Irish Learning," is not even mentioned.

In his preface, Canon Macculloch refers to the present study as "supplementary to" his earlier work "The Religion of the Ancient Celts."¹ It is a little difficult to understand what he means by "supplementary." Comparing the contents of the two books, we find that the earlier work contains practically everything that is in the present one, and a good deal more. The earlier presentation is far more detailed, and includes additional chapters on "The Cult of the Dead," "Primitive Nature Worship," "River and Well Worship," "Tree and Plant Worship," "Sacrifice," "Prayer and Divination," "Tabu," "Festivals," "Accessories of Cult," "Druids," "Magic," "State of the Dead." In short, "The Religion of the Ancient Celts" recognizes the intimate relation of fable and cult, primitive religion and primitive culture, and takes these relations into account. It is not a remarkable book. It does not show any striking critical acumen; but it displays a wide acquaintance with Celtic sources, is provided with the necessary textual references in convenient form, and is written in a clear style.

The "Celtic Mythology" has neither the virtues of its predecessor nor any distinguishing virtues of its own. One would not object to accepting the term "mythology" in its narrowest sense, even in relation to the scanty remnants that are left to us in the case of the Celts, if these remnants were presented systematically and critically, but they are not. One might forgive the book for being but a series of informal essays, if the chapters were really essays; but they are mere collections of *résumés*. One might even forgive it for being a mere collection of *résumés*, if the style preserved the original Celtic flavor; but the author has no more talent for narrative than for exposition. Whether the tale be tragic or humorous, his *résumé* never fails to lose the point. What can one make of these meandering phrases? "In this tale the general Christian attitude to the gods obtrudes itself — although the conception of their immortality and invisibility is accepted, they are demons or attended by these; Ethne had a demon guardian who left her when the angel arrived and as a result of her chastity."² Or again, "His rule over all because of certain dire events which befell many revellers in one night, a parallel to this being found in *The Children of Ler*, where, through their sorrows, these children are led to believe in God and in the solace which would come from Him; so that in the sequel they received baptism after they had resumed human form."³

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¹ Edinburgh, 1911.

² See p. 208.

³ See p. 210.